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March

1988

Volume 8, Number 12

Soil and Water Conservation News

United States Department of Agriculture
Soil Conservation Service

RC&D—Making Things Happen



Soil and Water Conservation News is the official magazine of the Soil Conservation Service. The Secretary of Agriculture has determined that publication of this periodical is necessary in the transaction of public business required by law of this Department. Use of funds for printing *Soil and Water Conservation News* has been approved by the Director of the Office of Management and Budget. *Soil and Water Conservation News* (ISSN-0199-9060) is published 12 times a year. Postage paid at Washington, D.C.

Magazine inquiries
Send inquiries to: The Editor, *Soil and Water Conservation News*, Public Information Division, Soil Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, P.O. Box 2890, Washington, D.C. 20013-2890.

Subscriptions
Send subscription orders to:
Superintendent of Documents
U.S. Government Printing Office
Washington, D.C. 20402

Comments:

From the SCS Chief

RC&D—Making Things Happen in Rural America

The Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) program—a joint public and private initiative—is helping rural America.

RC&D areas cover more than 1,300 counties across America. They are locally organized and run by council members from communities and conservation districts within the area. These people identify local needs and establish local priorities.

RC&D helps farmers, ranchers, and local agribusiness develop new marketing strategies, increase the efficiency of their operations, conserve natural resources, and protect the environment. Communities use RC&D to develop flood prevention measures, recreation areas, critical area (erosion) treatment for schools and other public property, and forestry initiatives. Going beyond natural resources, RC&D provides a focal point for efforts to develop solid-waste disposal facilities, hospitals, water systems, and other community facilities.

Making things happen in RC&D areas are the more than 4,000 local people who volunteer as council members. My hat is off to these good folks, who make life better for their neighbors and their community. Council volunteers give nearly 600,000 hours every year to the RC&D effort; and their yearly contribution in time, money, materials, and grants is valued at more than \$30 million. We all could take a lesson from this kind of volunteer effort and cooperation!

As neighbors and as conservation professionals, RC&D coordinators from the Soil Conservation Service are proud of their role. That goes for coordinators from other USDA agencies as well. They respect the hard work and self reliance of the communities they serve and the dedication of the RC&D councils.

RC&D is an important part of USDA's Rural Development Initiative. It helps rural people reach the specialists who know the most about a given problem—and the most about solving it. RC&D then helps pool the public and private resources needed to get the job done.

I am pleased with the way USDA, State and local agencies, and the private sector are working together in RC&D and other efforts to improve rural life. It goes to show that we can be good neighbors and good government. There's no better way to show how we take pride in America.



Cover: Stripcropping reduces soil erosion on this Green County, Wis., farm. In line with local objectives, RC&D councils are working with SCS in setting up conservation planning meetings with farmers to help them meet the conservation provisions of the 1985 Farm Bill. (Photo by Ron Nichols, photographer, SCS, Washington, D.C.)

Richard E. Lyng
Secretary of Agriculture

Wilson Scaling, Chief
Soil Conservation Service

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RC&D councils are helping farmers to form milk and hay cooperatives to receive better prices for their products. (Photo by Ron Nichols, photographer, SCS, Washington, D.C.)

RC&D—A Program For People

From critical area treatment in Pennsylvania to irrigation improvement in Arizona, the more than 4,000 Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) council members around the country are making things happen. They are doing things to improve life in their rural communities for themselves and their neighbors.

The RC&D program was established by the Food and Agriculture Act of 1962. The act authorizes the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to help local units of government to conserve and properly use natural resources in solving local problems and assigns leadership to the Soil Conservation Service.

Each RC&D area usually covers several counties and is run by a council representing the sponsoring organizations—county governments, soil and water conservation districts, towns, water districts, and other not-for-profit groups.

RC&D councils seek technical and financial assistance from USDA, State and local governments, soil and water conservation districts, or private industry.

Without the more than 4,000 council members and scores of others who work on committees and as advisors, the program would not be as strong as it is today. Working in the 189 authorized areas, these people are responsible for establishing new industries, finding alternative sources of energy, diversifying farm operations by trying new specialty crops, forming cooperatives to market what they produce, encouraging tourism, and helping to establish or improve local water supplies.

This issue highlights some other projects which councils have accomplished during the last year. These are just a sample of the more than 1,000 projects completed each year.

Ron Page,

national RC&D coordinator, SCS, Washington, D.C.

Farmers Save Money, Protect Resources

In New York, Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) councils are helping to improve the economic stability of livestock farming in the State. One way is by helping dairy farmers to adopt short-duration grazing systems.

Albert Valent, a dairy farmer near Watkins Glen, N.Y., is typical of the farmers who are changing their methods and profiting. In 1984, a grassland specialist with the Sullivan Trail RC&D area staff suggested to Valent that he change from feeding corn silage to a pasture-based feeding program.

Valent wasn't sure his 78 acres of old pasture and hayfield would meet the basic feed needs of his 70 Holstein milkers, but

based on the information provided through the RC&D staff he decided to try it. The pasture was divided into 15 paddocks of about 5 acres each. The cows were rotated on the paddocks every 3 to 4 days. Using the short-duration grazing system, Valent saved 63 tons of hay worth \$5,000. No longer needing to rent another pasture for his young livestock saved him an additional \$1,000. Valent also harvested 10.5 tons of hay worth \$850 from his new pasture system.

Valent was concerned that the change might reduce milk production, but with short-duration grazing, milk production actually increased. Between May and September when the cows were on pasture, milk production increased an average of 455 pounds per cow as compared with figures for the same period in 1983. Butterfat tests showed no change.

Valent said, "With short-duration grazing the herd is calmer, the cows are easier to handle, and there are fewer hoof problems." He is especially impressed with the productivity of the system and the dollar savings.

Other RC&D councils in New York are promoting upgrading the quantity and quality of feed through short-duration grazing as well as using forage plants to extend the grazing season. Improved forage enables farmers to profit from genetically upgrading their livestock. RC&D councils are also working with farmers on improving their livestock marketing strategies.

RC&D efforts to improve New York grasslands are reducing soil erosion on erodible land formerly used for growing silage, reducing nonpoint source pollution from feedlots and barnyards, and helping to keep farming a viable land use.

John A. Dickerson,
plant materials specialist, SCS, Syracuse, N.Y.

Darrell L. Emmick,
grassland specialist, SCS, Bath, N.Y.



RC&D councils in New York are helping dairy farmers to adopt short-duration grazing systems. Under the new systems, areas previously used for growing silage for feed are supporting well managed pasture grasses, reducing soil erosion on erodible hillsides. The new systems are also increasing milk production.

Making Things Happen

Rocks and Blocks Stop Erosion

The 10- to 15-foot high streambank had moved 30 feet closer to the picnic pavilion in the last 20 years. An estimated 300 tons of soil was eroding from the 360-foot section of streambank every year.

In 1987, Girard Borough officials in Erie County, Pa., saved the pavilion in their community park and stabilized the streambank along Elk Creek with technical and financial assistance from the Soil Conservation Service through the Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program.

The borough owns 110 acres along Elk Creek, and part of the land is a community park. Elk Creek, which empties into Lake Erie about 2 miles downstream, is a popular spot for fishing for trout, smallmouth bass, and salmon.

Phillip McCloud, SCS engineer in Waterford, Pa., recommended a combination of more than 100 large concrete blocks and 1,100 tons of rock riprap to stabilize the eroding bank. Eight rock-filled gabion baskets were used to make steps to provide safe access from the top of the streambank to the creek. RC&D critical area treatment funds paid for approximately 80 percent of the \$65,000 project, and the borough paid the rest. Borough crews installed a wooden safety fence along the top of the streambank and seeded the area.

The project has renewed interest in the park among local people and people in surrounding communities.

Lewis Steckler,
district conservationist, SCS, Waterford, Pa.

Spreading Out The Costs

In the arid southwest, where even friends and neighbors may fight over water, serious conflicts had arisen in recent years among several farmers on the Colorado River Indian Reservation. But now officials hope a measure adopted by the Lower Colorado RC&D Area Council will reduce the number of heated discussions along local irrigation ditchbanks.

Farmers grow mostly rotations of alfalfa and cotton under flood irrigation. Inadequate irrigation systems and poor water management had created shortages during peak demand and overirrigation early and late in the season, lowering crop yields.

The Colorado River Indian Tribes and the Parker Valley Natural Resource Conservation District sought help in solving the problem from the Lower Colorado RC&D Area Council. In cooperation with the Soil Conservation Service, the council put together a plan for improving the irrigation system and conserving water based on the 1984 SCS cooperative river basin study report, "Water Conservation and Resource Development, Colorado River Indian Reservation, Arizona, California."

Because of area farmers' limited financial resources, one alternative was using long-term contracts to spread costs over several years. The farmers proceed with the improvements using cost-sharing funds provided through the RC&D program and a combination of farm income and loans to meet their share of the costs. Technical assistance could be provided by SCS.

In the fall of 1987, five farmers entered into long-term, cost-sharing contracts, which cover 3 to 5 years. The cost sharing in the last year will be available only for irrigation water management. The contracts will provide for land leveling 760 acres, lining 6,000 feet of irrigation ditch with concrete, installing 30 flumes to measure water, and improving irrigation water management on 2,600 acres.

Christopher P. Williams,
public affairs specialist, SCS, Phoenix, Ariz.



Rocks and blocks protect this Elk Creek streambank in Erie County, Pa., from soil erosion, reducing sediment in the water and protecting a prime spot for picnicking and fishing.

In Rural America

CRP Farmers Chart Course

A Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) council in Idaho is helping farmers explore alternative sources of income.

David Bird and his neighbors in Oneida County, Idaho, have reseeded 60 percent of their cropland to grass as part of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The land, which is highly erodible, is to be kept out of crops for 10 years. In return, USDA will pay the farmers annual rental payments.

Although much of their cropland is now retired, these CRP farmers are determined to preserve their way of life. To look for other ways to make money from their land, farmers formed the Bull Mountain

Association. "I want our children to have the same opportunity that we had to make our living from this land," said Bird.

With assistance from the Bear River (RC&D) Council, members of the Bull Mountain Association took their concerns to Idaho Governor Cecil Andrus. The Governor had recently joined forces with USDA for a rural regeneration initiative. The State agencies of Employment, Commerce, Financial Management, and Agriculture combined with USDAs Forest Service, Soil Conservation Service, Farmers Home Administration, and Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service to provide this rural thrust. A Rural Enterprise Team made up of specialists from the various agencies was sent to assist the Bull Mountain Association in early December 1987.

The Bull Mountain Association feels that things need to be done now to prepare for the future. As a result of the meeting, the association developed three objectives: (1) to determine the feasibility of returning CRP land to annual cropping in 10 years

and applying conservation systems; (2) to evaluate alternative income sources with keeping the grass in place, including fee hunting and managing a buffalo (American Bison) herd for the specialty meat market; and (3) to develop alternative crops which will continue to keep soil erosion to a minimum.

The RC&D council helped the association apply for a grant from USDAs Small Business Innovation Research Fund. If approved, the grant will be used to demonstrate that raising bison can provide a competitive red meat industry that can support a secondary industry of recreation and hunting.

The Idaho Small Business Development Center and Southeast Idaho Council of Governments are helping the association develop business and marketing plans.

Michael Somerville,
assistant State conservationist, SCS, Boise, Idaho

Erosion Threatens Cemetery

Twenty years ago, the Magnolia Cemetery, in Helena, Ark., was beautiful and serene. Now, the East Arkansas Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Area is working to help make it that way again.

The Magnolia Cemetery was founded as a black cemetery in 1850. Among those buried there are former slaves, who died before the Civil War, and the late William H. Grey, the first black representative in the Arkansas Legislature, who died in 1968.

In recent years, water moving underground has caused graves to sink and tombstones to fall. Streambank erosion on a nearby creek has cut into gravesites and toppled markers, and the area has become overgrown with brush and tall grass.

Para Conner, widow of the late Dr. D.J. Conner, whose gravesite is at the edge of the eroding streambank, decided something had to be done. She and several others formed the Magnolia Cemetery Association and began to "strategize."

"That word 'strategize' is not in the dictionary," said Conner, a former school-teacher. "But it described what was needed."

The group requested help in the spring of 1987 from the Phillips County Conservation District. The district arranged for the Soil Conservation Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture to conduct an onsite study of the soils in the cemetery. SCS staff determined that the 36-acre site is in an area of highly erodible loess soil with 20 to 40 percent slopes and subject to severe water erosion.

At least nine churches with approximately 6,000 members still use the cemetery. "The churches were willing to help in any way they could," said Richard Bloesch, SCS district conservationist for the county, "but their resources were too limited to do it alone."

Bloesch suggested that assistance might be available from the East Arkansas RC&D Area. He and Bruce Leggitt, RC&D coordinator, then began the work necessary to submit the project for consideration. In September 1987, the RC&D council approved the project.

Since then, the RC&D council has been busy coordinating the efforts of numerous organizations to help stabilize the eroding slopes and repair the damage. The Arkansas Historical Society has agreed to help restore and replace tombstones and markers. Assistance will also come from the Arkansas National Guard, which has promised to supply trucks and personnel for hauling topsoil and rocks for reconstruction of the landscape.

Randy Lemmons,
soil conservationist, SCS, Helena, Ark.

Susie Harris,
public affairs specialist, SCS, Little Rock, Ark.

Rural School Back On Track

Colorado State Lottery funds are being used to help protect and develop outdoor athletic facilities at the Sangre de Cristo High School in Mosca, Colo., an area subject to severe wind erosion.

In recent years, blowing sand from nearby crop fields had created serious problems on the school's outdoor athletic field, particularly in spring, the windiest season. Students and their families had to travel about 15 miles to the town of Alamosa to practice for and compete in track meets and other outdoor sports.

In March 1985, school officials asked the San Luis Valley Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council for help in improving the athletic field. The council agreed to help locate and coordinate assistance.

Funding was not so simple. The school, which has about 120 students and is part of a rural school district, had limited financial resources for the project. The town of Mosca, which is so small that it triples in population when the school is in session, could do little. So school officials applied to Alamosa County for—and received—Colorado State Lottery funds. Lottery proceeds in Colorado go to each city and county as Conservation Trust Funds.

Soil Conservation Service personnel, working through the Mosca-Hooper Soil Conservation District, helped develop a plan for the project. The plan included a design for a new regulation-sized (400 meters) running track, but specified that first a drip-irrigated windbreak be installed to protect the area from the prevailing westerly winds.

One May morning in 1986, after local citizens had prepared the soil for planting, fifth grade students from the nearby Sangre de Cristo Elementary School helped to plant 110 Russian-olive trees to

form the windbreak. That afternoon the students helped roll out plastic tubing for irrigating the trees with water from the school's well-based water system.

The Russian-olives, which were provided by the Colorado State Forest Service, are suited to the area's alkaline soils and high water table. After 5 or 6 years of growth, they should no longer require irrigation.

SCS personnel staked out the new running track. Construction of the track—complete with curbs and gutters—was finished during the summer.

The school has thus far received and matched with its own funds about \$5,000 in lottery funds. It has applied for additional lottery funds to help develop a tennis court and a racquetball court in the same area.

Noel Wellborn,
RC&D coordinator, SCS, Durango, Colo.

Jack Russell,
district conservationist, SCS, Alamosa, Colo.

Firewood Thinning

Looking for inexpensive help in managing commercial woodland? Try "firewood cutters." That's the approach of the Fuelwood Marketing Project of the Idaho-Washington Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Area.

Nestled in northern Idaho's Panhandle and in northeastern Washington, the nine-county RC&D area extends from the fertile farmland of the Palouse into the rugged Bitterroot Range of the Rocky Mountains. More than 68 percent of the area is forestland, and one of the main goals of the RC&D council is to increase timber production and encourage the development of alternative uses of wood fiber.

The Fuelwood Marketing Project was developed in response to two major forest

problems in the area: there was no market for noncommercial, small-diameter trees, and thousands of acres of private woodland was stagnated, overstocked, and unmanaged because landowners lacked the financial resources to make improvements.

Firewood cutters also had a problem. They had to drive longer and longer distances to obtain dwindling supplies of firewood from State and Federal lands.

Five years ago, the RC&D Forestry Committee organized a tour of a pilot firewood-thinning program of the Washington Department of Natural Resources. Officials of the Spokane County Soil Conservation District (Washington), a sponsor of the RC&D area, attended the tour and decided to implement a similar program. They implemented the Fuelwood Marketing Project to provide firewood cutters plentiful supplies of wood within short driving distances. At the same time, the woodland owners receive precommercial thinning and stand improvement—at no cost.

The district administers the project for participating woodland owners. Foresters

mark the units for cutting by spraying the trees to be left with a band of colored paint. The units are then sold to firewood cutters at a typical price of \$65 for a 5-cord unit. The cutters sign contracts agreeing to complete the cutting within a set time frame and to clean up the slash.

The dollars received from the sale of the cutting units are used to pay for a full-time forester and for a contract forester during the busy spring and fall seasons. More than 3,000 units have been completed, resulting in improved timber stands on about 3,000 acres. More than 400 units were sold this past spring.

The RC&D council is sponsoring two other measures to expand the program into the Idaho portion of the RC&D area and in other Washington counties where similar problems exist.

Kim Ann Erk,
soil conservation technician, SCS, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

RC&D Staff Establishes Grant Library

The Headwaters Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Area staff in Butte, Mont., has helped its member counties obtain 22 grants and loans worth \$3.3 million during the last 3 years. The money has been used to fund soil erosion control measures, irrigation improvement projects, reforestation campaigns, and other community efforts.

Recently, the Headwaters RC&D Area Coordinator Ted Dodge and his staff established a library of information on corporate, foundation, Federal, State, and public grant sources. The staff will

evaluate the sources and develop a list to share with other RC&D areas across the country.

The library has a sister program in Durango, Colo., under the direction of Noel Wellborn, RC&D area coordinator.

Montana and Colorado had similar difficulties in locating a central site for finding grant sources, said Dodge, prompting establishment of the libraries. The two States have also started a pilot program to help local people search for grant sources. Searches are conducted by appointment on computer data bases, and hourly fees are charged for some searches.

The Headwaters RC&D staff is helping community organizations, conservation districts, city and county governments, agricultural marketing co-ops, hospitals, art museums, and many other organizations to locate grant sources.

"About 75 percent of the work has to be done before a group ever looks for a grant," said Dodge. Preliminary work includes thoroughly researching a project

to learn the history of the problem to be solved, identifying the scope of the problem, and identifying who will benefit from the project. Also, specific goals and a budget must be set.

The Headwaters RC&D recently sponsored a 4-day grant-writing workshop. The workshop covered writing and submitting proposals, searching and contacting potential funds, and building support for grant ideas. Technical areas covered included program design, project evaluation, and budgeting.

Kim M. Berry,
clerk-typist in the Stay-in-School Program, SCS,
Washington, D.C.

Reclaimed Mined Land to Become Learning Site

With help from the See-Kan Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) council and other local organizations, 90 acres of reclaimed mined land in Crawford County, Kans., is turning into a conservation education site.

The site had been strip mined for coal more than 50 years ago. It was a safety hazard and contributed sediment and other pollutants to local streams. When William Reals inherited the land in the early 1980's, he sought help in reclaiming it from the Crawford County Conservation District. The U.S. Department of the Interior's Office of Surface Mining and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Soil Conservation Service provided technical and financial assistance for the reclamation.

Work included smoothing and grading high walls, adding layers of limestone and soil, constructing an erosion control dam, installing 5,000 feet of tile outlet terraces, installing wildlife plantings, protecting several acres of wetland, and seeding 84 acres to native grasses.

Reals wanted the reclaimed site to be put to good use. See-Kan RC&D Coordinator Jim Gaskell and the SCS staff at the Girard field office had been involved in conservation activities at nearby Pittsburg State University (PSU) and knew that the school was looking for outdoor study sites. Reals liked the idea of the reclaimed land being used for outdoor education and donated it plus an additional 60 acres to PSU for use as a conservation education site. "The site will serve as an outdoor learning center for high school biology students and their teachers, university students and staff, local grade schools, and civic groups," said Gaskell.

Jim Triplett, PSU biology department chairman, and Cindy Ford, director of public education, are working on proposals for developing and using the site. One pro-

posal is to use the area for studying the adaptability of native grasses on mined land soils. Another is to analyze surface and subsurface water quality. Both will be projects for PSU graduate students.

Triplett and Ford, in cooperation with the conservation district, are working on a proposal to the Office of Surface Mining for funds to build a headquarters building and to cover initial operating expenses. They have also developed a natural history program called Nature Quest, which has been presented to approximately 1,500 people, mostly elementary school students. Nature Quest will eventually be based at the outdoor education center. Plans include developing a natural history museum and offering summer daycamps for students and workshops for adults.

Richard Cox,
resource conservationist, SCS, Emporia, Kans.

Top Farm Families Named

They come from different parts of the country, but they are similar in many ways. They each own a farm or ranch, they each work on their land with their families, they each believe in conservation, and they each have been named top conservation farmers of the year by the National Endowment for Soil and Water Conservation. They are: the Kloppe family of Missouri, the Russell family of Vermont, and the Howell family of Nevada.

"These families have each done something innovative, something cost effective, something that can easily be duplicated by a neighbor down the road," said Emmett Barker, chairman of the Endowment.

The Kloppe family of New Haven, Mo., was selected for developing a farm system that balances the need for producing feed, controlling soil erosion, and managing animal wastes. The family has a 420-acre crop and dairy farm and rents an additional 740 acres.

Together with their nine children, Lee Kloppe and his wife, Laverne, have been practicing conservation farming ever since they can remember. "Our whole farm is terraced, there are waterways, and we have underground outlets in our terraces," said Lee. "You see, we farm on sloping ground. Without those terraces, our soil would wash right down the hill."

The Kloppe family also practice animal waste management. "With the help of the Soil Conservation Service, we built a holding pit next to a concrete floor where we blade the manure into the pit," said Lee. "The liquid runs into a lagoon, and the solids are hauled out to the fields for fertilizer."

David and Janet Russell of Starksboro, Vt., were selected for their ability to blend soil and water conservation practices into their farming operation to make a successful dairy enterprise that protects the land as well as water quality. The Russells run a small Christmas tree business and have about 175 cows on their 460-acre farm.

"We've been farming for 18 years now and we started to do some no-till work a few years ago," David said. "We do several things now. We have no-till grasses, alfalfa, and corn, and we use a cover crop on our corn acreage that is most erodible."

Fred and Mary Howell of Wells, Nev., were selected for their ability to blend traditional and innovative techniques to turn abused farmland into a model ranch. They have a 5,820-acre ranch and also use 6,000 acres of Federal grazing lands.

The arid climate first made the Howells think about conservation. "In Nevada, we're always short of water," said Fred. "So, we developed a gravity irrigation sprinkler system on 320 acres of alfalfa hay. This system required no piping and we were able to extend our water use by a third."

On rangeland where little water was available, the Howells installed two live-stock watering systems, including an airmill system that is a joint effort with a neighbor. The airmill forces air down a shaft, which then forces water up into a 6,000-gallon trough. Since the airmill is only one-third the cost of a windmill and has no pump, it is virtually maintenance free.

This is the fifth year the Endowment, together with its corporate sponsor, the DuPont Company, has conducted the awards campaign. Families are nominated from all over the country, and 50 State winners are named. From that group, 10 finalists are chosen, from which the three top conservation farming families are eventually selected. The top families each receive a \$1,000 cash award and a trip to Washington, D.C., where they visit the White House, the Capitol, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. They also meet with Secretary of Agriculture Richard Lyng.

The National Endowment for Soil and Water Conservation is a not-for-profit organization devoted to the proper stewardship of the Nation's soil and water resources.

Thomas Ponton,
audiovisual production specialist, SCS,
Washington, D.C.



Lee Kloppe says that he and his wife, Laverne, have been practicing conservation on their dairy farm in New Haven, Mo., since they can remember. Part of their award-winning operation is a waste management system that stores manure until conditions are right for spreading it on cropland as fertilizer.

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Moving?

Send present mailing label and
new address including zip code to:

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Soil Conservation Service
P.O. Box 2890, Room 6202-S
Washington, D.C. 20013-2890

Official Business
Penalty for private use, \$300

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News Briefs

Deadline Nears

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) reminds farmers with highly erodible cropland that they have less than 2 years to meet the conservation requirements of the 1985 Farm Bill and remain eligible for USDA program benefits.

Wilson Scaling, chief of USDA's Soil Conservation Service, said those provisions require farmers who have highly erodible land to have a conservation plan approved by their local conservation district by December 31, 1989, and have it implemented by December 31, 1994, to remain eligible for USDA farm program benefits, loans, or guarantees on all their land.

About 800,000 conservation plans need to be developed in the next 2 years. Scaling said, "The sooner farmers ask for a plan, the greater the chance that we will get to everyone by the deadline."

Scaling said only 20 percent of the highly erodible cropland was placed under a conservation plan as of October 1, 1987. "Our goal is to have 65 percent of this land under a conservation plan by the end of 1988 and the rest by the end of 1989," he said.

Another option is to enroll highly erodible cropland in the Conservation Reserve Program. Under CRP, landowners receive annual rental payments for putting highly erodible cropland in permanent cover such as grass or trees.

Since highly erodible land is not always obvious to the eye, farmers should check with their local SCS office to see if they have land that meets the criteria.

"Contacting the local SCS office for a conservation plan soon is probably one of the smartest New Year's resolutions a farmer can make," Scaling said. "Most farmers who participate in USDA programs can't afford to lose those benefits. And, the economy of most rural communities is dependent on the financial health of its farmers."

Farmers Explore Choices

They talked about raising greyhound dogs, angora goats, alligators, and ostriches, and they talked about producing mesquite wood briquets. They were the more than 75 farmers and ranchers who attended a conference on agricultural alternatives in January at Burns Flat, Okla.

The Great Plains Resource Conservation and Development Area Council and the South Western Oklahoma Development Authority sponsored the conference.

Oklahoma State University Economist Jim Nelson told producers that before beginning an alternative enterprise, they should consider available financing, labor, and markets and their own capabilities and interests.

State officials spoke on the assistance available to producers wanting to diversify their farming operations.

Another conference is being planned to provide detailed information about financing and available assistance.

Rural Areas Benefit From Projects

Thirty counties have been added to nine areas receiving U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) assistance under the Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program. According to Wilson Scaling, chief of the Soil Conservation Service, some 3 million acres are included in the expansion, bringing the total number of acres involved in the nine areas to 40 million.

Scaling said the goal of the RC&D program is to achieve better use of each designated area's natural resources; improve and expand economic, cultural and recreational opportunities for local residents; and enhance the environment.

The RC&D program is run by area residents who set program priorities. USDA provides technical and financial assistance to local RC&D councils which include members of the sponsoring organizations—county and local governments, soil and water conservation districts, water districts, and other nonprofit organizations.

"This addition of 30 counties to the RC&D program areas is part of USDA's commitment to improving rural development efforts by providing local people with the help they need to make improvements to their area economies and environments," Scaling said.

California, Indiana, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, and West Virginia are the States where expansion took place.
